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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the ways in which youth organizations support families, highlighting the role of youth organizations in strengthening youth and their families; what youth organizations need to know and do to enhance their prospects for successfully supporting/strengthening youth and their families; and the type of external supports and opportunities that families need, and which youth organizations can provide, to support their growth and development. Data were collected via focus groups with youth organization practitioners and with parents of youth who were and were not participating in youth programs. In-depth assessments of youth workers and Youth Development Institute staff of eight youth organizations were also reviewed. Results indicated that youth development organizations can and often do support family strengthening by promoting emotional connectedness, goal sharing, promoting high expectations, mediating conflict between youth and families, providing role models, bridging worlds, and promoting parental efficacy. Recommendations include raising public awareness of the importance of the relationship between youth development and family strengthening; supporting identification, documentation, and dissemination of best practices integrating youth development and family development; and supporting training and strengthening frontline practice that integrates youth and family development. (Contains 12 references.) (SM)

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Youth Development and **Family Strengthening**

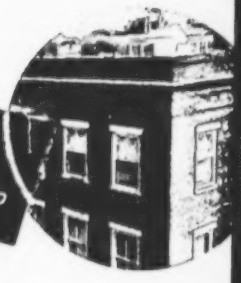
Authors: Michele Cahill, Sharon DuPree, Linda Pitts, Jean Thomases

A Study of Emerging Connections

Are youth programs a resource for adolescents? A resource for the entire family?

What do parents, especially parents raising teens in high-risk environments, want for their children?

Do youth programs help parents to build family connectedness?



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March 2002
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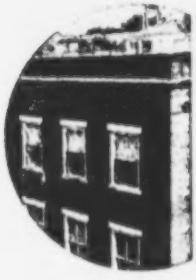

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Youth Development and **Family Strengthening**

A Study of Emerging Connections

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Acknowledgements

Youth Development and Family Strengthening: A Study of Emerging Connections is the work of many individuals and organizations. The Annie E. Casey Foundation provided the financial support and continues to lead in the national effort to recognize and develop this field. Deborah Delgado, Senior Associate, guides the initiative.

The authors, Michele Cahill, Sharon Dupree, Linda Pitts and Jean Thomases, have identified and integrated findings from research with the work of skilled practitioners. Each of them has continued their contribution since the completion of this publication. Sadly, Linda Pitts was taken from us in December 2000. Through this and other work she has left a powerful legacy. A summer internship for young people at the Youth Development Institute memoralizes her name.

Staff of eight youth development organizations contributed extensively by describing their practices and engaging parents, young people, and others to tap their ideas about this work.

Jessica Mates and other staff of the Youth Development Institute worked to support the study. Marsha Milan provided ongoing editorial and production assistance. Elizabeth Dossett edited the manuscript. Finally, without the help of Mary McCormick, President, and the staff of the Fund for the City of New York, this study could not have been undertaken.

With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Youth Development Institute continues its effort to expand our understanding of youth development and family strengthening, and to support youth workers in building a field of practice.

Peter Kleinbard
Vice President and Director, the Youth Development Institute
March 2002

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Executive Summary II

Youth Development & Family Strengthening: *A Study of Emerging Connections*

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's "Making Connections" initiative seeks to make a comprehensive long-term investment in a variety of diverse communities across the country with the goal of achieving a significant improvement in critical outcomes for families and children. The conceptual design for Making Connections focuses on three critical areas as central to neighborhood transformation: family strengthening, economic security and systems reform. Within the context of the Casey Foundation's neighborhood transformation agenda, this particular study is intended to increase understanding of the relationship between youth development and family strengthening. It also seeks to describe the role that youth organizations can play in contributing to both positive outcomes for young people and the strengthening of their families.

The study assumes that youth development is an ongoing process through which all young people attempt to meet their needs and build the competencies they perceive they need for survival and success. Moreover, while the young person is the central actor in his or her own development, youth grow up in social contexts including families, neighborhoods, schools, informal groups, and labor markets. Research on youth resiliency has demonstrated that young people whose lives are characterized by the presence of caring relationships with adults, high expectations, engaging activities, and opportunities to make contributions are likely to have positive outcomes even when they grow up in high-risk environments. Increasing the presence of these positive factors in the lives of young people is the goal of strategies for positive youth development. The most recent findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health and the National Academy of Sciences study on adolescent risk-taking have pointed to the powerful role of families in creating resiliency in adolescents.

While these findings should be common sense and self-evident, for a variety of reasons the important contribution of families to resilience during adolescence has been overlooked. Adolescence is clearly a time when young people signal adults through their speech, dress, and behavior their need to identify with a group of peers and to separate from childhood. Sometimes this more apparent focus on the influence of peers has marked teens' need for support from their families. In social services and health fields, funding patterns have focused narrowly on particular problems of targeted youth. A generation of research emphasizing troubled parent-adolescent relationships and teen alienation has nar-

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rowed practitioner expectations for families and limited the opportunities for contact and partnering. In the youth development field, advocating for more developmental opportunities and programs for youth has demanded much more attention and energyæoften obscuring the importance of families in young people's lives. The significant social and economic changes involving and impacting families in the last two decades also often placed new demands on youth development organizations.

Many youth workers have perceived parents as less available to their children and increasingly disconnected from their adolescents. These perceptions have led to a greater emphasis in youth development organizations on developing caring staff or mentoring relationships for youth. At times, this emphasis has given the impression that these relationships outside the family are intended to replace the family relationships, particularly when family relationships are strained because of difficult circumstances or conflicts between adolescents and their parents. In addition, the growing complexity of issues of autonomy and adolescent rights, especially confidentiality issues, also affected service providers. These changing conditions have made old patterns of relating to families unworkable. They demand the creation of new youth development practices that facilitate youth and family connectedness. This study sought information about such issues and practices.

Given the above challenges, the Youth Development Institute (YDI) has worked to articulate a youth development approach that:

- Illustrates the role of the family in promoting positive youth development;
- Identifies what families need to know and be able to do to enhance their prospects for raising healthy adolescents; and
- Describes the types of external supports and opportunities that families need from their communities to strengthen the likelihood of raising healthy adolescents.

YDI's emphasis on the importance of fostering convergence of youth, family, and community development is part of an emerging attentiveness to these fields. Family Support of America and Boys and Girls Clubs of America have shown keen interest, as has the City of New York in sponsoring its Beacons initiative. Beacons is an important example of the growing number of program models that integrate youth development and family support.

In undertaking this study, YDI sought to increase knowledge and understanding of the following questions:

- What do parents, especially parents raising adolescents in high-risk environments, want for their children and adolescents?
- How similar or different are these outcomes to those defined by youth program practitioners?
- How do parents view their teens' participation in youth development organizations in relationship to the development of values and competencies?
- How do parents regard the youth development organization in the following dimensions: Is it a resource for their daughter or son? Is it a positive or negative influence on their daughter or son? Is it a resource for the entire family?
- How do youth organizations understand parental roles during adolescence and address the inherent role tensions? These tensions include providing emotional support and guidance while also encouraging independence; balancing structure and limits with separation that allows for increasing autonomy; and encouraging contribution and responsibility along with

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independent choices and problem-solving.

- Do youth programs help parents build family connectedness, communicate high expectations, and cultivate self-efficacy in adolescents? If so, how do youth organizations contribute to these outcomes?
- What are the barriers that youth programs face as they work to build family connectedness, improve communication of high expectations, and nurture self-efficacy in their adolescents?

Methodology

YDI explored the central questions outlined above in a variety of ways. As a first step, a literature review was conducted of materials that address the relationship between youth and family development and the influence of the family and community on adolescent development.

Secondly, focus groups were conducted with parents, some of whose children were participating in youth programs and some of whose children were not. Focus groups were also held with youth organization practitioners. Finally, in-depth assessments by youth workers and YDI staff of eight youth organizations were reviewed. These assessments involved program observations, management and staff interviews, and interviews with youth at varying stages of adolescence.

Critical Findings from the Literature Review

As background for this study, YDI identified prominent researchers and research groups working in the areas of youth, family, and community development. YDI reviewed studies and articles and looked for themes and issues germane to youth development and family strengthening that could serve as a framework for constructing study questions and analysis.

The literature review clearly articulates the centrality of family connectedness in contributing to positive outcomes for children and youth and identifies research that describes concretely the relationship between youth and family development. Some of the studies included in the literature review focused on the importance of neighborhoods to healthy child and adolescent development. These studies described the importance of mediating institutions, such as youth organizations, for young people and their families.

One important concept identified was Frank Furstenberg's concept of "collective parenting." Furstenberg describes the ways in which social networks and community resources can contribute to effective parenting. He specifically argues that families and community institutions that share common values and expectations can bond together to provide parenting supports for young people, and that this process strengthens families while also helping adolescents. The concept of collective parenting is reflected in the experiences of parents, young people, and youth organization practitioners who participated in this study.

Critical Findings from Data Gathering

Information derived from data-gathering activities clearly indicates that youth development organizations can and often do support family strengthening. Data from youth organizations in Denver, New York City, and Savannah show family strengthening occurring in a variety of ways, including the following:

1. **Youth development organizations support family strengthening by promoting emotional connectedness.**

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Family connectedness (caring, emotional bonds, and emotional support) is the factor identified in research as most powerfully associated with adolescent well-being. Numerous and varied activities in youth organizations assisted in building emotional connectedness between parents and their children and among other generations. Parents also reported that staff in youth programs had helped them understand the stages of adolescence, some of the tensions typical in parent-adolescent relationships, and alternative ways of communicating with teenagers about decision-making to avoid intractable struggles over control. In a crisis situation, practitioners described how they had worked with a young person to maintain trust while helping him communicate with a family member.

2. **Youth development organizations promote family strengthening by sharing goals and promoting high expectations.**

This study found a congruence between parents' goals for their children and youth workers' goals for program participants. It also found that most parents and youth workers shared a common set of values, with some variation both between parents and between parents and youth workers.

Many parents in the study praised youth development organizations for having high goals for their teenagers and were very positive about program expectations for school performance and the strategies used to help young people achieve academic success. Overall, most parents in the focus groups viewed youth programs as a place for their adolescents to go that was safe, supportive, and offered expanded opportunities.

3. **Youth development programs promote family strengthening by helping mediate conflicts between youth and families.**

Research and practical experience indicate that developmentally appropriate tensions emerge during adolescence as a result of autonomy needs and redefining family relationships. During this time, youth programs are frequently in a position to play a mediating role in helping both the young person and the parents to understand their differences. Parents and youth workers in focus groups gave examples of how youth programs can provide the space adolescents need to separate from their families and offer a safe and productive environment for young people and their parents to address conflicts.

4. **Youth programs provide valuable adult role models outside the family.**

Some parents pointed to role modeling as an important area of youth program contribution. Most youth programs have young adults on staff, and parents reported that their children liked and admired those who held positive values and influenced them in ways they appreciated. Parents described two types of role models they felt were particularly significant in the lives of their children: one involved staff who were young men and women of color, many of whom had overcome obstacles similar to those faced by youth in the programs, and the second involved staff who could model overcoming mistakes.

5. **Youth development organizations promote family strengthening by bridging worlds.**

Findings suggest that youth development programs help young people and parents mediate their differences stemming from class, culture, and/or immigrant experiences. On the social class issue, parents pointed to encouragement,

guidance, and practical assistance that youth programs offered their sons and daughters in striving for and attaining opportunities the parents did not have and might not know how to access for their children. The most common example cited was going to college: many parents talked about ways youth organizations not only encourage young people to continue their education but provide information about a wide range of schools and scholarships. They also offered guidance and practical help in preparing for the SAT and filling out applications for college admission and scholarships.

Youth workers described many issues arising between young people and their parents in immigrant families when the young people had taken on many aspects of mainstream American culture. Youth and their parents struggled with differences in education, values, and customs. Once children reach adolescence, these differences can cause not only family conflict but also family disconnection. Youth organizations help bridge these kinds of gaps by encouraging young people to address these issues in their families and brainstorming with youth about ways in which they could interact better with their parents.

6. Youth development organizations promote family strengthening by promoting parental efficacy.

Parents in the focus groups who had attended family activities offered by youth programs described how the programs had helped them to be better parents. They indicated that they had more tolerance for adolescent behavior such as moodiness or ways of dressing. Another important factor cited by parents was their new knowledge through these programs about their teenagers' talents and about options for schoolingæknowledge that would now enable them to be more effective in helping plan their futures.

Implications for Practice and Policy

This study explored the important connections between youth development and family strengthening. By examining the work of youth organizations and listening to the voices of adults whose children attend the programs, staff who work in the programs, and young people who participate, the study found four implications for practice and policy. These include: (1) an emerging practice exists among youth workers that integrates youth and family development; (2) youth organizations face many challenges to fully realizing their potential for strengthening families; (3) more attention should be given to formulating effective strategies for integrating youth development and family development, and (4) youth organizations that integrate family development into their own practice are core resources for meeting the goals of improving outcomes for children.

1. An emerging practice exists among youth workers that integrates youth and family development.

The study found an emerging practice among youth workers that involves communication, including sharing information and expertise, and acting as bridges between family and young people. The study found, for example, that youth workers are sensitive to changing definitions of family, and they use these definitions when crafting communications on memos, letters, and flyers.

The study also found many examples of youth organizations sharing information and expertise, including offering parents information and support groups about adolescent developmental stages and the critical issues of sexuality and risk-taking. The organizations also offered families opportunities to share concerns and learn about successful paths adolescents can take to build compe-

tencies and form their identities. In the area of serving as bridges between family and young people, the study found, among other factors, that youth programs provide opportunities for young people to discuss cultural and generational conflicts they may experience at home.

2. Youth organizations face many challenges to fully realizing their potential for strengthening families.

The role of youth organizations in promoting stronger familiesæespecially during the critical developmental period of adolescenceæis not widely recognized. The youth organizations reviewed in this study ranged in sponsorship from YMCA's to settlement houses to faith-affiliated organizations and independent community-based organizations. Within the youth development field, the shift toward promoting stronger families has required a conceptual shift and a validation of activities that have often been viewed as peripheral to the core mission of organizations. Expanding this shift throughout the field will require changes in funding, increased staff training, and changes in staff development practices.

Strengthening and expanding the integrated practice of youth and family development requires addressing the lack of public policy and public and private funding that could support this kind of programming. The funding issue is a fundamental challenge facing the field of youth development as it works to build its relationship to address family support and family development. Despite all that has been written about the importance of family strengthening-based approaches, most public funding continues to be deficit-driven and problem-focused.

3. More attention in the field is needed to formulating strategiesæincluding organizational structures, programs, and practices that integrate youth development and family support.

The youth development field has developed a range of programs and operational settings that can more easily support social networks of both teens and parents. In all the Beacon community centers in the study, for example, intergenerational activities occurred frequently, while in the other youth organizations these were generally special events. From the networks of parents that were developed in these centers, a core group of members emerged who could work along with staff to generate youth and family development activities on a regular basis. Youth workers at other types of programs were positive about promoting youth development and family development and wanted more flexible funding as well as staff development opportunities to support effective practice.

Building on the emergence of a cohesive youth and family development practice requires stimulating and supporting dialogue within the field on premises and principles underlying good frontline practice. It also requires expanding staff development opportunities and other program supports.

4. Youth organizations that integrate family development into their programming are crucial core resources for meeting the goal of improving outcomes for children, youth, families, and neighborhoods.

The rich examples discovered in this study demonstrate the central support and mediating role that youth development organizations can play. Increasing understanding of the importance of this role among community leadership and within the fields of youth development and community development is a challenge that must be met.

Recommendations

This study recommends that the Annie E. Casey Foundation play a leadership role in building on the innovative practice of combining youth development and family strengthening. This role would include significantly intensifying its presence in urban communities and leveraging changes in public policy to support the integration of youth and family development. The following steps would be components of such a leadership role:

1. **Raise public awareness about the importance of the relationship between youth development and family strengthening and support leadership-building for a broad public agenda that includes youth and family development.**

   This step would entail raising public awareness of the importance of family connectedness to adolescent well-being and increasing public dialogue about the importance of youth organizations in this endeavor.

2. **Support identification, documentation, and dissemination of best practices integrating youth development and family development.**

   Organizations that have well-developed good practice should be documented in ways that make a powerful rationale for the integration of youth development and family support. This documentation should be explicit, backed by research evidence, and communicated in a way that clearly indicates how good practice looks in reality. This knowledge would be valuable to the many youth organizations that have the potential of strengthening their operations; to community initiatives seeking to improve outcomes for youth and families; and to the field of youth development.

3. **Support training and strengthening frontline practice that integrates youth and family development.**

   Providing support for expanding the emerging youth development field requires designing appropriate training and disseminating it to the field. Already, youth development professionals are in the process of identifying skills necessary to support quality frontline practice. As this process continues, it is critical that the expertise necessary to work effectively in integrating youth and family development be incorporated into training. Training tools such as curricula and handbooks are needed to assist youth organizations attempting to incorporate best-practice examples.

4. **Support strategies that recognize youth organizations as crucial partners in comprehensive approaches for improving outcomes for children, youth, families, and neighborhoods.**

   Where organizations working to integrate youth and family development are part of larger neighborhood or citywide strategies, provide support for them to further develop their practice. This funding should go toward initiatives such as Casey's Making Connections and toward those whose public funding is being coordinated between youth and family funding streams. It should also go toward community-change initiatives in cities where community-based youth development programs are strong.

III Introduction

As a result of a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to explore the role of youth organizations in family strengthening, the Youth Development Institute (YDI) conducted a research study to document the ways in which youth organizations support families. This study increased our understanding of the relationship between youth development and family strengthening, and provided us with concrete examples of practices, which clearly demonstrate the role that youth organizations play in fostering positive youth and family development. In undertaking this research, YDI worked to articulate an emerging field of family-centered youth development that:

1. Describes the role youth organizations play in strengthening youth and their families;

2. Identifies what youth organizations need to know and be able to do in order to enhance their prospects for supporting/strengthening youth and their families;

3. Identifies the type of external supports and opportunities that families need, and which youth organizations can provide, to support the growth and development of youth and their families.

In undertaking this study, we sought to increase our knowledge and understanding of what parents want for their children and adolescents and how similar or different are those outcomes as defined by youth program practitioners. We wanted to determine whether families felt youth organizations were beneficial to their children/adolescents, and whether program practices helped parents build family connectedness, communicate high expectations, and cultivate self-efficacy in their adolescents. In addition, we wanted to better understand the barriers that youth organizations experience in their work to strengthen families. The following report, *Youth Development and Family Strengthening: A Study of Emerging Connections*, is the end product of our efforts.

Michele Cahill Sharon DuPree Linda Pitts Jean Thomases

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Context & Goals of the Project IV

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections initiative seeks to make a comprehensive long-term investment in a variety of diverse communities across the country with the goal of achieving a significant improvement in critical outcomes for families and children. The conceptual design for Making Connections focuses on three critical areas as central to neighborhood transformation: family strengthening, economic security, and systems reform. Within the context of the Casey Foundation's neighborhood transformation agenda, this particular study is intended to increase understanding of the relationship between youth development and family strengthening. It also seeks to describe the role that youth organizations can play in contributing to both positive outcomes for young people and the strengthening of their families.

The study assumes that youth development is an ongoing process through which all young people attempt to meet their needs and build the competencies they perceive they need for survival and success. Moreover, while the young person is the central actor in his or her own development, youth grow up in social contexts including families, neighborhoods, schools, informal groups and labor markets. Research on youth resiliency has demonstrated that young people whose lives are characterized by the presence of caring relationships with adults, high expectations, engaging activities, opportunities to make contributions and ensure continuity, are likely to have positive outcomes even when they grow up in high risk environments. Increasing the presence of these positive factors in the lives of young people is the goal of strategies for positive youth development. The most recent findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health and the National Academy of Sciences study on adolescent risk-taking have pointed to the powerful role of families in creating resiliency in adolescents.

While these findings should be common sense and self-evident, for a variety of reasons the important contribution of families to resilience during adolescence has been overlooked. There are several reasons for this reduced attention to the role of families. Adolescence is clearly a time when young people signal adults through their speech, dress and behavior their need to identify with a group of peers and to separate from childhood. Sometimes this more apparent focus on the influence of peers has marked teens' need for support from their families. In social services and health fields, funding patterns have focused narrowly on particular problems of targeted youth. A generation of research emphasizing troubled parent-adolescent relationships and teen alienation narrowed practitioner expectations for families and limited the opportunities for contract and partnering. In the youth development field, advocating for more developmental opportuni-

ties and programs for youth has demanded much more attention and energy, often obscuring the importance of families in young people's lives. The significant social and economic changes involving and impacting on families in the last two decades has also often placed new demands on youth development organizations

Context & Goals of the Project

Many youth workers experienced parents as less available to their children than in the past and increasingly disconnected from their adolescents. These perceptions led to a greater emphasis in youth development organizations on developing caring staff or mentoring relationships for youth. At times this emphasis has given the impression that these relationships outside the family are intended to replace the family relationships, particularly when family relationships are strained because of difficult circumstances or conflicts between adolescents and their parents. In addition, the growing complexity of issues of autonomy and adolescent rights, especially confidentiality issues, has also affected service providers. These changing conditions have made old patterns of relating to families unworkable. They demand the creation of new youth development practices that facilitate youth and family connectedness. This study sought information about such issues and practices.

Given the above challenges, the Youth Development Institute (YDI) has worked to articulate a youth development approach that:

- Describes the role of family in promoting positive youth development;
- Identifies what families need to know and be able to do in order to enhance their

Making Connections

Making Connections, a demonstration project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, seeks to improve the life chances of vulnerable children by helping strengthen their families and neighborhoods. Begun in 2000 as a three-year demonstration working in neighborhoods in 22 cities, Making Connections grows out of the long-term Casey initiative called Neighborhood Transformation/Family Strengthening.

The objectives of Making Connections are to connect young people and their families to:

- **Economic Opportunity.** The project provides information and networks that increase pathways to local and regional labor markets, access to affordable goods and services, the likelihood of securing adequate and predictable incomes, and opportunities to accumulate assets.
- **Social Networks.** These networks include friends, neighbors, kin, community organizations, mentors, faith-based institutions, and other relationships that encourage and provide support and mutual aid and reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Services and Supports.** These are accessible, affordable, family-centered, and culturally appropriate forms of help that provide preventive and ongoing assistance.

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prospects for raising healthy adolescents; and

- Examines the types of external supports and opportunities that families need from their communities in order to strengthen the likelihood of raising healthy adolescents.

Through YDI's work we have come to believe that community-based youth development organizations can serve both as important providers of developmental supports and opportunities for youth and also act as bridges between youth, their families and the formal and informal institutions of community life. We have come to understand the centrality of community-based youth development organizations and some limitations of current conditions and current practices of many youth organizations regarding parents and families.

YDI's emphasis on the importance of fostering convergence of youth development, family development and community development is part of an emerging interest in these fields in broadening perspectives. Family Support of America has encouraged its members to include a focus on adolescents and families in its programming and devoted an edition of its journal to the theme: "Youth Development: Family and Community Strategies." Boys and Girls Clubs of America have adopted a formal Family Support Program in recognition of the importance of working in partnership with families and youth to achieve positive youth outcomes.

Context & Goals of the Project

The Beacons Initiative in New York City is an example of a growing number of program models that integrate youth development and family support. The Beacons were designed as school-based community centers that would promote youth

The foundation has identified three broad indicators of success it hopes to achieve in the first three years of the initiative: stronger families; community leaders prepared to act as advocates and champions of family strengthening; and neighborhood commitment and capacity to collect and use data. These data will be used to monitor neighborhood and family conditions, set priorities about the use of community resources, and advocate for change.

The foundation will:

1. Help assess the conditions, needs, assets, and strengths of families and neighborhoods;
2. Provide or help targeted neighborhoods receive technical assistance;
3. Convene, organize, and mobilize people around a common vision for family strengthening that reflects a community voice;
4. Seek opportunities to help various levels of government and the private sector align their interests and activities with the community's vision of family strengthening;
5. Strengthen local capacity to gather and use data effectively; and
6. Make flexible dollars available to seed innovative approaches to connecting families to sources of support and to leverage additional resources.

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Context & Goals of the Project

development through a range of programs and opportunities for children and adolescents, but would also be centers for family activities in their neighborhoods. YDI's long experience with Beacons has been an impetus for our understanding of the crucial connections between youth development strategies and family strengthening, and we undertook this study to further our understanding of the convergence of youth development and family strengthening, especially in urban neighborhoods. In undertaking the project we sought to increase our knowledge and understanding of the following questions:

- What do parents, especially parents raising adolescents in high-risk environments, want for their children and adolescents? How do they define these outcomes?
- How similar or different are these outcomes to outcomes as defined by youth program practitioners?
- How do parents view their teen's participation in a youth development organization in relationship to the development of values and competencies?
- How do parents regard the youth development organization in the following dimensions: Is it a resource for their daughter or son? Is it a positive or negative influence on their son or daughter? Is it a resource for the entire family?
- How do youth organizations understand parental roles during adolescence and address the inherent role tensions? These tensions include providing caring emotional support and guidance while also encouraging independence; balancing structure and limits with separation allowing for increasing autonomy; and encouraging contribution and responsibility along with independent choices and problem-solving.
- Do youth programs help parents to build family connectedness, communicate high expectations, and cultivate self-efficacy in their adolescents? If so, what do youth organizations do to contribute to these outcomes?
- What are some barriers that youth programs experience as they work to build family connectedness, improve communication of high expectations, and nurture self-efficacy in adolescents?

"Community-based youth organizations serve not only as important providers of development supports and opportunities for young people but also as bridges between youth and their families during the critical adolescent years."

In seeking to expand our understanding of these questions, we have assumed that the term "family" applies to those individuals with whom the young person lives and who have primary responsibility for meeting his or her physical and emotional needs, providing guidance, transmitting culture and shaping values. In this project we recognize the diversity and complexity of many contemporary families. While the majority of young people are living with one or more biological parents, many others are living with relatives or other adults who make the commitment to act as "family", and provide sustained physical and emotional support to the young people for whom they assume responsibility.

Another core assumption has been that community-based youth organizations serve not only as important providers of development supports and opportunities for young people but also as bridges between youth and their families during the critical adolescent years. Psychologists point out that it is developmentally appropriate during adolescence that social contexts outside the family inevitably play an important role in supporting and contributing to young people's emerging autonomy and sense of independence. We view youth organizations as important examples of informal community-based institutions that offer a social context outside the family of the adolescent. These organizations encourage them to develop new skills and competencies, develop relationships with other caring adults, and have opportunities to form positive relationships with their peers. This growing independence within a positive community framework is a healthy process of child and adolescent development. When there is disconnection between teenagers and their families, many youth organizations can provide the back-up support for adolescents.

This study sought to understand how most youth organizations provide a middle ground or a kind of neutral space within which young people and their families can have the chance to work out their changing relationships. In addition, the study explores issues of congruence of values and desired outcomes for youth between families and youth workers.

As these questions suggest, the study has focused on the interaction between youth and family development, and on the contributions that youth organizations can make to strengthen families as they work with young people. The process of exploring these questions was critical to expanding our understanding of the ways in which the contextual supports, provided through the work of community institutions such as youth organizations, contribute to the healthy development of young people, while also strengthening their families and the communities.

V Methods of the Study

A. Overview

Through this study YDI explored the central questions outlined above in a variety of ways. As a first step we reviewed literature that addresses the relationship between youth and family development, and research on the influence of family/neighborhood on the development of adolescents. This literature helped design focus group questions, and provided a conceptual framework for the study with questions relevant to the work of both policy makers and practitioners. The relevant findings are summarized in the section of "Critical Findings from the Literature Review."

Secondly, we conducted focus groups with parents of youth participating in youth programs, adults whose children may or may not be participating in youth programs, and youth work practitioners. Finally, we reviewed in-depth assessments of eight youth organizations that involved program observations, management and staff interviews, and interviews with youth at varying stages of adolescence, to look for convergence's between youth development and family development or disconnection in goals and practices.

Through the focus groups with parents whose children are participating in youth programs, we gathered information on their goals for their adolescents and their view of the role of youth organizations in the lives of their children and their families. In focus groups with adult participants in activities such as adult education in community centers we sought information on why parents might or might not encourage or allow their child/teenager to participate in a youth development program. Through focus groups and structured observations with practitioners we have identified specific program activities which operate at the intersection of youth and family development. We also identified challenges to implementing youth development practices that support families. The information from these various sources of data is presented in the section on " Findings from Data Gathering."

Finally, we have formulated suggested recommendations and next steps which outline possible future areas of work that can contribute to broadening understanding of the intersection between youth and family development, identifying best practices that contribute to this connection and describing some of the barriers that need to be addressed as the relationship between these two important areas of work are deepened and enhanced.

B. Literature Review

As background for this study, YDI identified prominent research groups working in the area of youth development, family development and neighborhood context including the Aspen Institute, the National Academy of Sciences-Forum on Adolescence, and the Family Impact Seminar. YDI also identified key researchers in these areas including Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Lawrence Aber, Theodora Ooms, and Frank Furstenberg. We reviewed research and looked for themes germane to youth development and family strengthening, and concepts that could serve as a framework for constructing study questions and analysis.

C. Data Collection

YDI invited four youth development organizations in New York City and the youth organizations in Savannah and Denver who are involved in the Beacons' National Adaptation Project, to participate in the study by hosting focus groups of parents and other adults who were participants in the program.

Two focus groups were conducted at each of the New York City sites. One of the groups consisted of adults whose children were actively involved in Beacon activities; the other group included adults who participated in Beacon programs but did not have children involved at the Beacon. The groups were divided in this way in order to capture a range of adult perspectives. Each of the eight focus group sessions in New York City was co-facilitated by a YDI staff member and a Beacons staff member. In both Savannah and Denver focus groups were held only for adults with children participating in the programs. These sessions were also jointly facilitated by a YDI staff member and a member of the Beacon coordinating agency staff from that city.

Beacons were chosen for this component of the study because they are a youth development model that foster program activities that consider the multiple needs of young people. They were also chosen because they have large numbers of adults participating in activities such as GED, adult basic literacy and ESL classes. By focusing on a program model that has extensive participation of both youth and adults the study was able to capture views about youth programs from a broad range of perspectives. Protocol questions for the parent focus groups addressed parents' perceptions of the value of youth organizations, parental goals for their children/adolescents, and parental insight on adolescent development.

Another source of data for the study were two youth worker focus groups of line staff, and middle managers from six different youth serving organizations. The participants for these groups were drawn from agencies that are working with YDI on promoting best practices in youth development, but were not working in Beacon programs so that the data collected would include the experiences and observations from a broad range of youth practitioners. The youth workers

"We reviewed research and looked for themes germane to youth development and family strengthening, and concepts that could serve as a framework for constructing study questions and analysis."

Methods of the Study

who agreed to participate were briefed in understanding the purposes of the project and the questions underlying the study of youth development and family development. The youth workers answered questions from a protocol designed by YDI. The sessions focused on topics such as parental goals vs. practitioner goals for youth, direct/indirect family involvement activities at their organization, and barriers to working with families in their organizations.

Each focus group session was taped and transcribed. YDI staff analyzed the data for themes and project staff and consultants identified key areas of importance, recurring issues and unexpected observations

A third source of data for this study came from structured observations that were conducted at the program sites. Six youth workers from the four Beacons programs that recruited adults for the focus groups were trained to observe activities in a way that would allow them to record interactions between adolescents and their families that they observed at the center. Observation forms were designed by YDI and introduced at the training. Youth workers then observed and trained additional staff to observe activities at the Beacon that involved parents/families. Post observation interviews with staff at each Beacon were conducted to discuss data collected and to talk about linkages between youth development and family strengthening.

What are Beacons?

The New York City Beacons are school-based community centers managed by nonprofit community-based organizations working collaboratively with their community school boards, principals, advisory boards, parents, teachers, school administrators, youth, religious leaders, and private and city service providers and subcontractors. Beacons provide a range of services to children, youth, and adults in the non-school hours, up to 12 hours per day, 7 days a week.

Each Beacon offers a mix of social, recreational, educational, vocational and other services developed in response to communities' interests and needs. Examples include drama groups, sports activities, leadership development groups, and entrepreneurial activities. Beacons offer adults family support programs, health services, and employment preparation groups. Many Beacons serve as centers to organize neighborhood safety and other community-based activities.

The first 10 New York City Beacons were established in 1991 in response to the recommendations of a study group chaired by former Attorney General Nicholas deB. Katzenbach to develop a coordinated anti-drug strategy in the city. The number of Beacons has grown continuously and today there are 81.

Currently each Beacon receives core support of about $400,000 annually from the City of New York Investment by private foundations also assists the Beacons, much of it focused on improving the quality of services through special programs, technical assistance, staff training, and evaluation. Most Beacons have also developed strong participation by community volunteers.

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Finally, for this study YDI staff reviewed extensive data that they have collected as a result if their work with over twenty youth serving organizations as part of their Networks for Youth Development project. Each organization in Networks participates in a peer assessment process which involves both program observations and extensive interviews with program staff and youth participants. Data from these peer assessments was reviewed in order to gain further information from a broader pool of participants and practitioners regarding the intersection of youth and family development.

The Beacon design is based on research findings on youth resiliency in high-risk environments and findings from evaluations. These findings point to the need to take a youth development rather than a youth deficit orientation. This approach views youth as central actors in their own lives rather than as passive clients of services. It defines youth development as:

> "an ongoing process in which all young people are engaged and invested, and through which young people seek ways to meet their basic physical and social needs and to build the competencies and connections they perceive as necessary for survival and success."
>
> *(Pittman, K. and Cahill, M., Youth and Caring: The Role of Youth Programs in the Development of Caring. Center for Youth Development and Research, Washington, D.C., 1992).*

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Findings VI

A. Critical Findings from the Literature Review

Initially, research in the area of youth development focused on the individual and the particular tasks and challenges adolescents face as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. This approach emphasized the individual biological and psychological needs that shape development during this period and did not balance this individual perspective by also focusing attention on the critical social systems that support and contribute to individual development.

It was primarily the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner that helped to broaden our understanding of the process of development as the product of the interaction between the individual and his or her environment. In his elaboration of an ecosystem approach to understanding development, Bronfenbrenner stimulated both researchers and practitioners to expand their perspectives and to analyze developmental processes through these broader contexts. The youth development field has incorporated this broader perspective and had increasingly sought to both describe and understand adolescent development in the context of the critical social systems in which young people live and grow. This broadening of perspective is central to our understanding of the interaction between youth and family development, and in the literature review we have particularly sought to identify sources that seek to describe and understand adolescent development through these contexts.

It is clear from our review in recent years, there has been a growing understanding that the supports and opportunities provided by these social contexts contribute significantly to the achievements of positive outcomes for young people. The family especially is seen increasingly as having a critical role in positively supporting the development of young people. This importance was described in the Carnegie study "Great Transitions" published in 1996: As the report stated:

> Those who work with adolescents also have had misconceptions about relationships between adolescents and their families. A previous generation of studies, which focused on troubled parent-adolescent relationships, emphasizes the alienation of adolescents from families as inevitable. The perspectives drawn from these studies overlooks the potential of families to promote good health, high educational achievement and ethical values for future adult responsibilities. It has discouraged education, health and youth development professionals from seeking ways to strengthen families in their critical role during the second decade of their children's lives.

This comment in the Carnegie Report challenged those working in the field to better understand the interrelationship between youth and family development and suggested the significance of this relationship for improving outcomes for young people.

Findings: Literature Review

In an earlier overview of the research on adolescent relationships with their families, Laurence Steinberg also questions the perspective that relationships between adolescents and their families are dominated by conflict and detachment, suggesting that this emerged from a psychoanalytic perspective and is not in fact supported by available empirical evidence. In his review, Steinberg highlights research that suggests this as a period in which important transformations in the parent-child relationships do occur, and that the ways in which the family and the young person manage this transformation have implications for the youth's development. The changes involve moving toward an interdependent relationship and have been described as a process in which "both parent and adolescent actively participate in the mutual and reciprocal process of redefining the relationship." In this transformation process, adolescents remain responsive to parental authority but in a context of greater freedom.

The change does not take place without some conflict and disruption in the family relationships, but these conflicts and re-adjustments of roles happen in the context of maintaining the emotional bonding and support that characterize positive relationships between adolescents and their families. Steinberg's writing articulates the developmentally appropriate tensions that inevitably exist between adolescents' increasing sense of their own autonomy and their continuing attachment to their families. These tensions and paradoxes are experienced by both parents and practitioners. In this process, youth organizations play a critical role in providing a neutral space within which both young people and their families can be helped to understand the evolving roles and the changing relationships and can receive support in learning about and adapting to these new roles.

Recent research has further demonstrated the important role of families in contributing to the positive development of adolescents. In a review of the research on promoting protective factors in the family, school and community that was carried out by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, the following family characteristics were identified as powerful predictors of positive outcomes for children and youth: (1) caring and support and a consistent emotional bond; (2) high expectations for behavior and achievement; and (3) acknowledging and encouraging young people as valued participants in the family and providing opportunities for youth to contribute to the families in meaningful ways.

Another critical piece of research referenced earlier in this report is the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescence carried out by the National Academy of Sciences. The objective of the study was to identify risk and protective factors at the family, school and individual level as they relate to four domains of adolescent health and morbidity: emotional health, violence, substance use and sexuality. The family context that was examined for the study included the following five variables: 1) parent-family connectedness; 2) parent-adolescent activities; 3) parental presence; 4) parent-school expectations; and 5) family suicide attempts and completions. This study found that family connectedness, defined as caring support and a consistent emotional bond, is a significant protective factor for youth. It also found that youth who perceive high parental expectations for school achievement do better in school and have other healthy behaviors.

In summary, this research describes the family characteristics that support positive youth out-

comes and suggests the areas of intersection between youth and family development. It underscores that understanding the relationship between adolescents and their families requires a commitment to balancing the tensions and the sometimes contradictory tendencies that characterize this relationship. On the one hand, adolescence is a period in which the young person's growing need for independence and autonomy must be supported and respected. At the same time, both research and practice confirm that healthy adolescent development is supported and enhanced by the following characteristics of family life: family connectedness, high expectations, structure and discipline that provides clear and consistent rules and, finally, by opportunities to make positive contributions to family life. Balancing the tensions and contradictions inherent in the relationship between adolescents and their families is central to expanding our understanding of what is required to achieve positive outcomes for children and families.

Theodora Ooms and Frank Frustenberg introduce concepts that are helpful in describing a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between youth and family development. In a paper entitled, "Where is the Family in Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families?" written for the Aspen Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families in 1996, Ooms introduces the concept of "family capital." She uses the term to include "both the resources and capacities families use inside the family and those it exercises in its social relations with others." As she describes it, "family capital" helps establish the link between human capital (the resources of individuals) and the social resources of the community. Using an ecosystem approach that draws on the work of Bronfenbrenner, she argues that comprehensive strategies must recognize the interconnections between community, social and family capital and the interventions in each of these domains must explicitly be related to the other domains so that they support and reinforce each other.

"Healthy adolescent development is supported and enhanced by the following characteristics of family life: family connectedness, high expectations, structure and discipline that provides clear and consistent rules and, finally, by opportunities to make positive contributions to family life."

In practice, many interventions have dynamic multiple effects. For example, a young person who assumes responsible roles in the context of a youth program can then take his new sense of responsibility and apply it to his family relationships as well. In many youth programs the parent or family is encouraged to support the young person in the pursuit of specific goals and the parent as well as program staff join together to reinforce their mutually held high expectations for the young person. In other situations, the family and the youth program may share a common set of rules regarding acceptable behavior and can join together to establish important limits for the young people with whom they are involved. These kinds of interventions that may appear on the surface to be targeted at the young person, in fact, may contribute to positive outcomes for both the family and the young person and can be part of a process of creating a dynamic that strengthens family connectedness.

Another useful concept for articulating the connections between youth and family development is outlined by Furstenberg in an article entitled "How Families Manage Risk and Opportunity in Dangerous Neighborhoods." Furstenberg articulates a concept he calls "collective parenting" and begins to describe the ways in which social networks and community resources can contribute to effective parenting that supports healthy development. He describes collective parenting as a "system that promotes shared parental responsibility through delegation of control and sponsorship to both formal agencies and informal networks. The availability of resources, the relatively high degree of normative consensus, and strong social bonds forged by kinship and friendship all contribute to a close connection between local institutions and the family." He goes on to state that if the ideal of collective parenting has validity and "if we are committed to strengthening the family, we must give more attention to rebuilding local institutions—schools, churches, neighborhood centers and recreational services—that support families."

"Our examination of the activities of many youth organizations and our focus groups with practitioners illustrate the extent to which youth organizations understand the importance of working with families in order to achieve positive outcomes for young people."

Furstenberg argues that families and community institutions that share common values and expectations can bond together to provide parenting supports for young people and that this process of collective parenting strengthens families while also helping young people. Particularly in what he defines as dangerous neighborhoods, Furstenberg contends that parents and families need to create broader networks of support and mutual responsibility in order to carry out their parenting roles successfully. He does not see community institutions such as youth organizations as rivals who are trying to replace the role of the family but rather as important resources to the family and its members.

Finally, the recently published two-volume Neighborhood Poverty, edited by Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Greg J. Duncan and J. Lawrence Aber made a valuable contribution to the literature review. Together these volumes provide an intensive examination of the impact of neighborhoods on individuals and families. The general conclusion of the various studies that are summarized in these volumes is that it is possible for families to adopt strategies that alleviate the negative effects of poor distressed neighborhoods on children and families. However, it is much less likely that neighborhood factors will be able to alleviate the negative impacts of problematic families on their children. The dominant message emphasizes the central importance of families in providing the opportunities and supports needed for a healthy development.

In the third chapter of Volume II, Policy Implications in Studying Neighborhoods,

Robin Jarrett describes a variety of reasons why family influence can, under certain circumstances, alleviate neighborhood effects. She describes specific parenting strategies that are used by families to counteract the problems of living in poor neighborhoods. These include

neighborhood protection strategies, parental monitoring strategies and parental resource-seeking strategies. She concludes her discussion by stating "It is access to resources as mediated by parenting skills, family resources and social relationships that may prove to be most important in mediating the affect of neighborhoods on development."

All of this literature underscores the important role of families in promoting healthy development. Some of the studies also refer to the importance of mediating institutions such as schools or neighborhood organizations in supporting families. The literature review did not, however, uncover research that focused on or explicitly documented the contributions that community institutions such as youth organizations can make to the development of "family capital" or contribute to "collective parenting." While the data gathered in the course of this study are descriptive and limited in scope, they do illustrate concretely the ways in which youth organizations can serve as mediating institutions in supporting families.

The literature review for this study clearly articulates the centrality of families in contributing to positive outcomes for children and youth. We were also able to identify research that concretized the relationship between youth and family development and articulated the tensions that are an inherent part of it. In addition, the findings from the literature review helped us to clarify the information we were seeking about the roles and contributions youth organizations might have in supporting positive outcomes for both young people and families. Finally, the literature review helped to identify concepts such as Furstenberg's "collective parenting" that contribute to our understanding of the interrelationship between youth and family development and that we could apply to the various data collection activities that we undertook.

B. Findings from the Data Gathering

In this project, our examination of the activities of many youth organizations and our focus groups with practitioners illustrate the extent to which youth organizations understand the importance of working with families in order to achieve positive outcomes for young people. We uncovered a youth development practice that incorporates family development work. These organizations begin with the belief that helping parents to build family connectedness, communicate high expectations and cultivate self-efficacy in their adolescents is part of their mission. In a variety of ways these organizations help parents address the inherent role tensions of adolescence, including providing caring emotional support and guidance while also encouraging independence; balancing structure and limits with separation; allowing for increasing autonomy; encouraging contribution and responsibility along with independent choices and problem-solving.

Organizations that integrate family development approaches provide individual help to parents and also frequently offer a variety of parent support groups. At the same time, these organizations, as part of their work with young people, structure activities that allow parents to be more involved with their children. These activities include socialization for family members and their adolescent children so that they will have opportunities to do things together that they might not do if the parents had to plan them on their own. They also include parents in celebrations of their children's accomplishments and contributions. Finally, these youth programs align with the family to articulate and enforce high expectations. Experience has shown that this can be a powerful reinforcing alliance when young people experience both their families and

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other caring adults joining together to communicate shared hopes and expectations.

Findings: Data Gathering

The following summary of findings from data collection includes numerous examples of the specific practice of those youth organizations working to support both youth and family development. The data-gathering activities provided examples that illustrate these practices and their impact on the family as described both by parents themselves and by the youth practitioners who are challenged to navigate the middle ground between young people and their families during adolescence. The critical role that youth organizations play as identified in this study, along with the barriers they face in carrying out this role, have implications for how practitioners can best continue to build the connection between youth and family development.

Information gathered for the study clearly indicates that youth development organizations can and often do support family strengthening as consistent with research findings cited above. These activities also identified consistent challenges to youth programs and to supporting family development. The data from all the participating sites including Denver, New York City and Savannah show family strengthening occurring in a variety of ways, including the following:

1. **Youth development organizations support family strengthening by promoting emotional connectedness.**

   Family connectedness (caring, emotional bonds and emotional support) is the factor identified in research as most powerfully associated with adolescent well-being. We found that parents readily communicated examples of this and that youth workers were able to identify examples in practice that they observed.

Many parents said that activities, such as performances or recognition ceremonies that they attended, often helped foster a more cohesive feeling among family members. Staff were caring, supportive and nurturing to young people and seemed to see their adolescents in a different light. Parents spoke of young people who were uncommunicative at home speaking out in youth center events, or young people who appeared sullen at home looking interested and happy. Other parents talked about seeing that their "rebellious" adolescent had particular talents and needs. These experiences gave parents a broader sense of their child and an opportunity to talk with their son or daughter about something in the teen's life other than family or school performance issues.

Some of the youth organizations also offered parent workshops to facilitate communicating about adolescent issues. Parents expressed positive feelings about these activities, citing both the helpfulness of the content and the opportunity to share experiences with other parents of teenagers. The focus groups also revealed that non-traditional families (such as foster parents or grandparents raising grandchildren) especially appreciated these activities as helpful with struggles related to lack of communication due to the generation gaps or young people's anger at the previous family situations. Parents cited the helpfulness of youth workers in promoting more open communication between adolescents and their parents about teen issues such as dating, sex education, peer pressure and AIDS. Some parents, who talked of conflicts with their sons or daughters in these areas, reported that staff in youth organizations helped them to understand the pressures young people experience today. Staff also helped patents find ways to talk with the teenage children about

their concerns, values and perspectives without polarizing the situation.

In addition, parents reported that staff in youth programs helped them understand the stages of adolescence, some of the tensions typical in parent-adolescent relationships, and alternative ways of communicating with their teenage children about decision-making. Youth workers spoke about how many teens express that they want privacy and autonomy from their parents while at the same time they want support and understanding. While these developmental tensions were highly charged around issues of dating and sex, they were also present in other ways. Youth workers gave examples of youth who stated that they did not want their families to be invited to recognition ceremonies or events. Yet, when they were prevailed upon to do so, the young people experienced pride and appreciated their family's recognition and support for their accomplishments.

The study found that privacy was a complicated issue for practitioners in youth programs. Often youth workers felt torn between the need for adolescents to trust them and the need for parents to know about some problems their sons or daughters were experiencing, but that the teen wanted kept from their parents. Youth workers in the focus groups talked extensively about what they called the "gray area." They felt that young people appropriately needed and wanted some privacy and independence. They also felt young people did not want all their program activities reported on even when those activities were very positive and consistent with family goals.

However, when teens confided in their youth worker matters such as pregnancy, being in trouble with the law, or being targeted for violence by another peer group, youth workers believed that it was important to work with the teen on developing a process to communicate about these matters with a family member. They talked about the tensions in working with the young person to maintain trust while helping them to communicate with a family member or responsible adult. For example, a staff member in one focus group described his work with a young man who was gay but was terrified about sharing this information with his family. The young person was certain that his family, especially his father, would be furious and reject him. The staff person, recognizing that this situation had to be addressed within the family if the family bonds were to be maintained, worked with the young person until he felt able to have a family meeting with the worker present to discuss this issue with his father. In the words of the worker, "It turned out in the family session that he learned how to communicate with his father. This was a turning point in his life...and it was wonderful to see how the father responded to the way his youngster communicated with him." In this situation, the youth worker clearly played a critical role in preserving and strengthening the family bonds in the face of a situation that could have damaged the young person's relationship with his family.

"Family connectedness (caring, emotional bonds and emotional support) is the factor identified in research as most powerfully associated with adolescent well-being."

" 'It turned out in the family session that he learned how to communicate with his father. This was a turning point in his life...and it was wonderful to see how the father responded to the way his youngster communicated with him.' "

Findings: Data Gathering

Intergenerational activities were identified by youth workers as another example of the kind of opportunities that can provide the "glue" that helps bond some families together. Parents who participated with their sons or daughters in retreats, "outward bound" types of activities, and neighborhood improvement projects offered by the youth organizations, said these opportunities broadened their views of their children. Youth workers indicated that teens seemed more understanding of their parents as individuals who also have interests and challenges based on these experiences. Many parents, on the other hand, commented that they relied on the youth program to plan activities that they could engage in with their adolescents. They reported that if the family planned a private outing or activity they often encountered resistance from their child. However, when an activity was planned by the youth program and involved other friends and families their adolescent sons and daughters were eager to participate because they knew other peers and families would be involved.

2. Youth development organizations promote family strengthening by sharing goals and promoting high expectations.

This study found a congruence between goals held by parents for their children and goals youth workers had for participants in their programs. We also found that most parents and youth workers shared a common set of values with some variation both among parents and between parents and youth workers. For example, parents wanted a safe place for their son or daughter where they would stay out of trouble, stay off the streets, and generally speaking avoid drugs, violence and friends who would influence them in negative ways. Many parents in the focus groups also wanted to create positive peer groups and environments that were alternatives to the streets, and wanted to help young people develop positive values as well as their talents.

Many parents in the study praised the youth development organizations for having high goals for their teenagers, sometimes saying that the program's goals for their son or daughter exceeded their own goals for them. Many parents were also surprised by the high expectations the programs communicated to their teenagers. Most parents volunteered that their primary expectation of their child's participation in a youth programs was that it "would help them do better in school." Some mentioned specific activities such as music or sports that they believed would really benefit their teenager. Parents were very positive about program expectations for school performances and strategies for helping young people achieve academic success. This was consistent with findings from the youth worker focus groups where practitioners consistently expressed the belief that good youth development organizations should encourage young people to

do their best in academic endeavors as well as social activities.

Parent views on academic expectations did vary. Some parents described their surprise at the high level of expectations program had for their sons or daughters. One mother said that she and her son had been perfectly satisfied with the "C's" he received in most of his classes since he was passing, but that staff of the youth program had encouraged him to raise his grades. In this instance, the youth worker also spoke with the mother about encouraging her son to strive for higher goals. Many parents in the focus groups talked about ways youth organizations encourage youth people to continue their education in college and offer supports that range from providing information about colleges and assistance in preparing applications, to helping a teen obtain a scholarship to a private boarding school or college.

Sometimes, however, this important support was not communicated to parents. In one case, a youth leadership program deeply involved young people in planning their own future and placed emphasis upon academic achievements and community service. Yet, the program staff was not communicating the program's mission or activities to the participants parents. In the assessment interviews, when youth were asked for suggestions of changes in the program, they requested that program staff convey to their parents the activities taking place in the program and why the young people were so involved. In the view of the young people, they knew why they were spending a great deal of time with the program, but they were having trouble explaining it to their parents. The adolescents felt the staff could better describe how the goals of the program reinforce the goals of the family. In this instance, the youth program was so focused on its work with the young people it did not connect the goals of the parents to their own goals, nor the potential impact when there was congruence between program and family goals.

Overall, most parents in the focus groups had an understanding of the role of youth organizations and were pleased that their adolescents had somewhere to go outside the family that was safe. Most youth workers expressed the view that it was part of their job to find innovative ways to integrate the goals of youth and parents in order to facilitate individual development and family connection.

3. Youth programs promote family strengthening by helping to mediate conflicts between youth and the families.

As the literature review suggests, it is not sufficient to describe adolescence as a developmental period that is dominated by conflict, detachment and alienation from families. At the same time, it frequently happens during this period that tensions will emerge as a result of adolescents' increasing sense of autonomy and their need to define a new relationship to their parent(s) and/or family. In this context, those youth programs that engage primarily with young people but are also in touch with and have earned the trust of families are frequently in a position to play a mediating role helping both the young person and the parents to understand their differences. In these situations, youth organizations can serve as an intermediary between youth and their families. They can provide the space adolescents need to separate from their families, but also offer a safe and productive environment for young people and their families to address conflicts and explore their changing relationship. In these situations, youth workers saw themselves as work-

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ing to explain the differences and reduce the tensions and conflicts that arise.

These tensions and conflicts can take many forms. The young participants often want recreational opportunities, places to go to be with their friends and to have time away from their families. Parents, on the other hand, tend to want the programs to focus on academics or to help their son or daughter get a job. Youth workers grounded in the principles of youth development understood the complex developmental needs of adolescents and the importance of providing them with diverse opportunities and challenges. They recognized that they might understand the importance of young peoples' involvement in recreational activities or art or community service activities offering them new developmental opportunities more than the parents. In the focus groups, youth workers described their experience of the tension between their approach to engaging adolescents in a range of activities and the views of some parents that getting a job or focusing solely on academics should be a priority.

Youth workers described having conflicts with parents about very young adolescents working, especially "off the books" at ages 12 and 13 rather than attending program activities. In one instance, a 12-year-old girl dropped out of a program where the youth worker felt she was making good progress with academic improvement and social skills, including getting along better with her parents, because her mother had sent her to live with an aunt for the summer who had found her a job in telemarketing. The youth worker reported that the mother felt the young person needed to make money so she could buy herself the kind of clothes she wanted for school. Youth workers described the importance of having agency guidelines in negotiating with young people and their families when these types of serious problems exist.

In describing their approach to these conflicts, youth staff talked about the balanced role they try to play. On the one hand, they felt that it was important for them to articulate to the parents the rationale and the value of their children's participation in a range of activities. They wanted to be supportive of what the young person wanted and also saw that it was an opportunity to broaden the parents' understanding of their children's developmental needs. At the same time, if the parents insisted, the youth worker would respect the parents' point of view because they wanted to avoid increasing the area of conflict by taking sides with the young person, and they recognized that it was not helpful to undermine parental authority.

In situations in which families were experiencing serious problems or in which the health and safety of the child was involved, the role of the youth program was more complicated and sometimes required that the program take a stronger position regarding parental demands or interference. Many youth workers said that within the same families they might share values and expectations with only one adult family member or that some parents have problems themselves with alcohol, drugs or criminal activities with which their children were struggling to cope. Often these parents reacted to the youth programs and the relationships formed by their children with suspicion and anxiety. Sometimes this took the form of discouraging or forbidding youth attendance at the program. When programs know there is a risk to the health and safety of the child, they follow procedures as mandated by state law and report the family to the appropriate authorities. In other cases in which the young person's participation is clearly bene-

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ficial and supportive to the adolescent who is dealing with severe family problems, youth staff will intervene with the family and work intensively to dispel feelings of mistrust and suspicion on their part so that they will not interfere with or block the child's participation in the program.

4. Youth organizations provide valuable adult role models outside the family.

Some parents pointed to issues of gender and role modeling as important areas of contribution by youth programs. Parents described this as a positive relationship with their children that did not replace their own relationship. Most youth programs have young adults on staff, and parents reported that their sons and daughters liked and admired staff members who held positive values and influenced youth in ways that the parents appreciated. Mothers of teenage sons valued the presence of male staff, especially African American and Latino men as youth workers, whom they pointed out as important influences on their sons. They felt that these men could talk with their sons, guide them and model positive masculine roles.

The parents consistently described mentoring roles without specifically identifying staff as "mentors." One mother illustrated this view. She had come to one of the centers to speak about her son with a male youth worker she had seen in the neighborhood. An eighth grader, he had begun skipping school, hanging out on the street and staying out late. She felt comfortable asking the youth worker to look for her son and speak with him about the program and try to get him involved. In this instance the mother saw the youth worker as a role model and a potential resource who could reach out to her son in ways that could be more effective than if she did it. To a lesser extent, but mentioned by parents, was the impact of female staff as role models. Mothers of adolescent girls also described ways in which the female program staff could reach out to their adolescent daughters and discuss issues with them in ways that the mothers could not.

Parents described two types of role models they felt were important. One model involved staff who are young men and women of color, many of whom have overcome obstacles similar to those faced by youth in the programs and who then become embodiments of the goals and the potential of youth to achieve the goals. A second type involved staff who could model overcoming mistakes. One of the youth organizations in the study had a clearly articulated strategy of hiring African American male staff, including not only college-educated professionals but also men from the neighborhood. One volunteer mentioned in a parent focus group was a father from the neighborhood who had come to the center after rejoining his family when he was released from prison where he had been serving a sentence for a drug offense. He first came with his children, then joined an adult literacy class, and now serves

"They can provide the space adolescents need to separate from their families, but also offer a safe and productive environment for young people and their families to address conflicts and explore their changing relationship."

as a volunteer. Parents described how young people know that he had "turned his life around." Therefore, he daily embodied the possibility of committing oneself to a different and positive way of life. Parents also felt that this type of role model helped young people whose parents were experiencing serious problems with alcohol or drugs to overcome their shame and talk with staff about their problems.

5. Youth development organizations promote family strengthening by bridging worlds.

Findings suggest that youth development programs help young people and parents mediate their differences stemming from class, culture and/or immigrant experiences. Parents pointed to encouragement, guidance and practical assistance youth programs offered their sons and daughters in striving for and attaining opportunities they did not have. The most common example cited was college. Many parents talked about ways youth organizations not only encourage young people to continue their education but provide information about a wide range of schools and scholarships, guidance and practical help in preparing for the SAT and filling out applications for admission and, especially, scholarships. Youth workers described this area as one in which they have contact with families that sometimes involved what they described as conflicts and tensions rather than problems.

Youth workers stated that young people sometimes experienced opposition or resistance from their parents to such plans as going to college full-time or going away to school. One youth worker described a situation where she had identified an opportunity for a young man from Brooklyn to attend a private boarding school in Connecticut on scholarship. He was scheduled to visit and have an interview on a Sunday, but his mother said that she had changed her mind on Saturday and he could not go. By meeting with the mother and son the youth worker found that the mother had no transportation, could not afford to pay to go with her son to see the school, and was embarrassed to tell anyone. She also felt reluctant to send her son to a place where no one in the family had met anyone or seen the environment. The staff member drove the youth and his mother to the private school and discussed the issues involved in making such a significant change in circumstances.

Youth workers described many issues arising between young people and their parents in immigrant families as young people have taken on many aspects of mainstream American culture. Youth and their parents struggle with differences in education, values and customs. Once children reach adolescence, these differences not only cause family conflict but also family disconnection. English fluency can also alter power dynamics in families with resultant conflicts. One of the ways youth organizations have helped to bridge these kinds of gaps is to brainstorm with youth about ways in which they would like to use their skills to interact better with their parents.

"Findings suggest that youth development programs help young people and parents mediate their differences stemming from class, culture and/or immigrant experiences."

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In one program in New York City's Chinatown, Asian youth were given video cameras to record the different types of activities they were involved in at the program as a way of showing their family "the world inside the center." In turn, the parents wanted the youth to record family activities so the staff could see "the world inside their family." This exercise was very successful. The young people loved using technology; the families liked learning about the program and seeing what their children did while they worked long hours. The center benefited because it learned more about the families of youth in their programs. The center took on the project because it was having trouble getting immigrant parents to allow their children and teens to participate in the center, and they felt that once the parents understood what went on it would feel less foreign to them and they would be more receptive.

The study also revealed that youth workers, families and youth struggle with issues related to the varied cultures of program participants and tensions arising in these groups. Many youth organizations enroll young people from more than one culture in the community. Affirming a diverse range of cultural values can present special problems. Asian parents in one focus group complained that their teenagers spent too much time in activities such as performing arts or social and leadership groups and too little time studying. They felt that the programs should not give participants choices of activities but require several hours a day of studying. An interesting misperception was that the youth workers were not college educated. They were surprised to learn this in the focus group since their notion of jobs for college-educated people was predominantly traditional professions such as medicine or law. In addition, these were the jobs they wanted the program to steer their child toward. Youth workers tried to find a way to talk with parents about all the interests of their teenagers and the options for success in the United States. One of their successful strategies has been to bring in a diverse group of Asian professionals to family events at the center.

Latino parents wanted their sons and daughters to value their home cultures and wanted programs to offer activities that reflected their cultures. Some parents felt that programs were not sufficiently sensitive to cultural differences by nationality even when neighborhood populations changed, for example, affirming Puerto Rican but not Mexican culture. They valued involvement by their children in these types of activities. Youth workers reported challenges in helping young people to function in their bi-cultural or multi-cultural environments.

The overall experience of youth organizations is that they help young people and their families to build bridges between their different worlds in a variety of ways. First, they provide a context and opportunities in which different ethnic and cultural traditions can be learned about, honored and celebrated. For example, a youth program that works in a predominantly Dominican community offers opportunities for the youth and adults to celebrate their heritage through dance and artistic expression. This has meant that the young people have been able to see their parents carrying out cultural traditions that they had never seen and in many instances had never even had described to them. They said that seeing their parents dance or create art in the tradition of their parents' homeland helped them feel closer to their families and their history and built connections for them to traditions that seem distant from their life in the United States.

Youth programs frequently face the challenge of developing programming that reflects and honors particular cultures, histories and child-rearing practices while at the same time ensuring that the program provides opportunities for the development of a broad range of youth competencies. For example, at one youth program located in a predominantly African-American community, the families sending their children to the program have made it clear that they want a program that demands a high degree of discipline from their children. In their view, discipline, clear rules and strictly enforced respect for adults demonstrate caring and concern and are essential elements of any program. The program staff are working to implement a program that respects these values but also balances the emphasis on imposed discipline with a recognition of the importance of providing young people with opportunities to learn to make good decisions and solve problems without always relying on external structures. In the process of balancing these perspectives, the youth program must take on the task of articulating for the families the importance of this kind of developmental approach and its applicability to the relationship between parents and children outside of the context of the youth program.

6. Youth development organizations promote family strengthening by promoting parental efficacy.

Some parents in the focus groups who had attended family activities or parent workshops offered by youth programs said that the programs had helped them be better parents to their adolescents. They indicated that they had more tolerance for adolescent behavior such as moodiness or for the ways in which their sons and daughters dressed. Other important factors cited by parents were their becoming more knowledgeable through the programs about their teenagers' talents and about options for schooling so that they could be more effective in helping them with their futures. Events such as youth recognition ceremonies gave parents more information about their children, especially about how they were expanding their skills and competencies in contexts outside the family. Parents in focus groups said that they did not know that their son or daughter had such talents and that their adolescents did not talk to them about it. While this reticence or privacy is normal during adolescence, providing opportunities for parents to gain this information about their adolescents increases their capacity to be effective for them.

Parents also reported appreciating the information they gained from youth programs about such matters as high school and college options and links to scholarships and employment for their children. For example, high school students have to make choices about which courses they will take and many parents have no experience or knowledge about the consequences of these choices. They indicated that attending meetings at the programs with their sons and daughters made them feel that they gained information and confidence so that they could be helpful to their children in making decisions.

Some youth programs that have the resources to do so are also providing parents with opportunities to develop their own skills and, in some instances, with employment related assistance. Program activities may include offering adult basic education, GED and computer classes, as well as a range of employment assistance. As one parent said, "If you can improve yourself as a parent by attending GED classes, obtaining your GED, furthering your education, you're going to feel better about your child and how you

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interact with your child and the goals that you have for your child."

Programs that are able to implement activities specifically designed for adults recognize the value and impact of these activities. While parents value and appreciate the expanded opportunities their children may be getting as a result of their participation in a youth program, parents also wish that they could have similar opportunities for themselves. In some cases neighborhood youth programs offer recreational and socialization activities just for adults so that the parents can participate fully. In the words of one of the parents who participated in a focus group, "Just to know that I can go here and participate. It really makes a parent feel good about themselves, that they can have fun just like the kids." These words were echoed by another parent who said, "You know families and parents are always looked at like counseling recipients but never that they really need to have fun too."

Whether it is a chance to enjoy themselves with other peers or opportunities to develop their skills so they can get a job or improve their current one, it is understandable that parents want opportunities for themselves similar to what their children are being offered. When programs are able to involve families in this way, a positive dynamic is created with the participants and the families. The program can become a place that engages all the members of the family in different ways. While young people still want to keep their own separate space within the program, they experience their parents differently when they see them positively engaged with other parents on working to improve their basic skills or improve their employability. In these situations, program activities and opportunities can become a resource for the whole family rather than one that is only for the children and youth.

These kinds of parent activities indicate a changing consciousness of best practices in youth development work that characterized most of the youth programs in the study. Their commitment to working in partnership with families is based upon two reinforcing notions. One is that the supports and opportunities that programs provide for youth are more effective when the family is informed and supportive. The second is a growing recognition that these programs are well-positioned to help adolescents and parents build or sustain emotional connections during adolescence with age-appropriate boundaries. For example, even as the programs build stronger working relationships with parents, they must also establish appropriate boundaries so that the young people experience their participation in the program as separate from their families. It is a continuing challenge to youth practitioners to develop stronger relationships with families while at the same time maintaining the separate space for program activities that will meet the developmental needs of adolescence for independence and autonomy.

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VII Implications for Practice & Policy

This study has explored the important connections between youth development and family strengthening. By examining the work of youth organizations, and listening to the voices of adults whose children attend the programs, staff who work in the programs, and young people who participate, the study is able to describe the critical relationship between youth and family development and the existence of an innovative practice emerging in youth work that integrates youth and family development.

1. **Youth development practice that incorporates family development includes the following:**

   Communication:

   - ✔ Youth workers are sensitive to changing definitions of family; they craft appropriate communication (memos, letters, flyers); and use literature depicting diverse family structures.
   - ✔ Youth programs create opportunities for parents/guardians and other family members to share in recognizing contributions, work and achievement of young people.
   - ✔ Youth programs provide information to families about their offerings and hold family events.
   - ✔ Youth programs have staff with diverse backgrounds and experiences who can relate to both young people and families.
   - ✔ Youth programs sponsor family events involving not only parents, but also siblings and other family members in informal relationships with one another, peers and staff.

   Sharing Information and Expertise:

   - ✔ Youth organizations offer parents information and support groups about adolescent development stages and developmental needs, including focusing on critical issues such as sexuality and risk-taking.
   - ✔ Youth organizations offer families opportunities to share concerns and learn about successful paths adolescents can take to build competencies and identities.

   Serving as Bridges between Parents/Guardians & Young People:

   - ✔ Youth programs provide opportunities for young people to discuss cultural and generational conflicts they may experience with their families.
   - ✔ Youth programs provide parents opportunities to learn about youth culture and

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discuss tensions between connectedness and autonomy.

- ✔ Youth programs assist young people and parents to experience opportunities outside the family such as college trips, travel, or events that bridge gaps between youth and families.
- ✔ Youth programs sponsor events that enable youth to experience affirmation of youth culture within boundaries acceptable to parents/guardians.
- ✔ Youth programs develop intergenerational programs.

2. There are many challenges to youth organizations fully realizing their potential for strengthening families.

The role of youth organizations in promoting stronger families, especially during the critical development period of adolescence, is not widely recognized. The youth organizations participating in this study were either involved in community program models or were organizations that had committed themselves in implementing best practices in youth development. While they ranged in sponsorship from YMCA's to settlement houses to faith-affiliated organizations and independent community-based organizations, they did not represent the full range of practice in the field. Within the youth development field this work has required a conceptual shift and a validating of activities that have often been viewed as peripheral to the core mission of organizations. Expanding this shift throughout the field will require changes in funding, increased staff training and changes in staff development practices.

Strengthening and expanding the practice of integrating youth and family development requires addressing the lack of public policy and public and private funding that supports this kind of programming. The funding issue is a fundamental challenge facing the field of youth development as it works to build its relationship to family support and family development. Despite all that has been written about the importance of developmentally appropriate strength-based approaches, most public funding continues to be deficit-driven and problem-focused.

In addition, even when public funding supports developmental approaches, these public resources do not integrate family or parent activities except in programs that are directed at young children such as day care or head start programs. As a result, programs working with pre-adolescents and adolescents often have to do so by finding other resources or adding this work on top of the ongoing activities that are officially funded. As the public debate about families and family strengthening continues, it is critical that we be willing to make public investments that will support the development of young people while also strengthening their relationship to their families.

3. More attention in the field is needed for formulating strategies, including organizational structures, programs and practices that integrate youth development and family support.

The youth development field has developed a range of programs and operational settings that support social networks of both teens and parents. These can become the basis for gaining information, broaden perspectives and opportunities for problem-solving. For example, in all the community centers (Beacons) in this study, intergenerational activities occurred frequently while in the other youth organizations these were generally special events. The networks of parents

that were developed in these centers through activities such as adult education, arts activities, and neighborhood involvement, and the networks of teens developed through youth leadership councils, clubs, and activities such as youth newspapers or community service provided a core group of members who could work along with staff to generate youth and family development activities on a regular basis. Youth workers at other types of programs were positive about promoting youth development and family development and wanted more flexible funding as well as staff development opportunities to support effective practice.

Building on the emergence of a youth development and family development practice requires stimulating and supporting dialogue within the field on premises and principles underlying good front-line practice. It also requires expanding staff development opportunities and other program supports.

4. Youth organizations that integrate family development into their programming are important resources for meeting the goals of comprehensive efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth, families and neighborhoods.

The rich examples that exist demonstrate the central support and mediating role that youth development organizations can serve. They can increase emotional connectedness between families and adolescents and between parental agency and youth initiative and responsibility.

Improving understanding of the importance of this role among leadership in communities and within the field of youth development, family support and community development is a challenge that needs to be met to ensure that these important comprehensive community initiatives do not ignore a crucial resource to their success.

Recommendations

This study recommends that the Annie E. Casey Foundation play a leadership role in building on the innovative practice in youth development and family strengthening to significantly strengthen its presence in urban communities and to leverage changes in public policy to support the integration of youth and family development. The following steps would be components of such a leadership role:

1. **Raise public awareness about the importance of the relationship between youth development and family strengthening and build leadership for a public agenda that includes youth and family development.**

   Increase public understanding of the importance of family connectedness to adolescent well-being and increase pubic dialogue about how mediating institutions such as youth organizations can assist families to support adolescents.

2. **Support identification, documentation and dissemination of best practices integrating youth development and family development.**

   Provide support for the identification, documentation and dissemination of the range of strategies and activities that are consistent with sound youth development principles and support family strengthening. Good practice should be documented. This documentation should be backed up with research evidence and communicated in a concrete way that shows what this approach looks like in practice. This knowledge would be valuable to the many youth organizations that are involved in family support activities, youth development, and community building initiatives.

3. **Support training and strengthening of front-line practice that integrates youth and family development.**

   Training must be designed and disseminated to the field so that youth practitioners will have the skills to support this approach in their work. The field of youth work is in the process of identifying the skills and competencies necessary to support quality frontline practice. As this process continues, it is critical that the particular competencies that are needed to work effec-

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tively with families be incorporated into the overall skill set for youth workers. Tools, such as handbooks and curricula, are needed for communicating these examples and shaping the content of practice.

4. **Support strategies that recognize youth organizations as partners in comprehensive approaches for improving outcomes for children, youth, families and neighborhoods including the Annie E. Casey Foundation initiative, *Making Connections*.**

In places where organizations and/or initiatives that are working to integrate youth and family development are part of larger neighborhood or citywide strategies, provide support for them to further develop their practice. This should include a variety of examples such as the following: initiatives where practitioners are working to integrate practices and where public funding is being coordinated between youth and family funding streams; and community change initiatives in cities where community-based youth development programs are strong. These should be chosen and provide examples of the kinds of partnerships that could result from changes in policy and practice.

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- **Michele Cahill** is the founder and former director of the Youth Development Institute (YDI) at the Fund for the City of New York, which conducts projects with schools, community-based organizations, and public agencies aimed at increasing youth development opportunities in New York and other cities. At the Academy for Educational Development (AED) from 1985 to 1991, Michele was responsible for developing or managing all program areas concerning school reform, the prevention of adolescent pregnancy, and school dropouts. Beginning in 1985, she was AED's Senior Program Officer and Program Director for School and Community Services. In 1989, she was appointed Vice President and Director of School and Community Services. Michele received a Master's degree in Urban Affairs in 1972 from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. After a one-year appointment as a Revson Fellow, she entered a doctoral program in Social Policy and Planning in Columbia University's School of Social Work.

  In August, 1999, Michele joined Carnegie Corporation of New York as Senior Program Officer in the education division, responsible for the Corporation grants to improve the educational performance of urban school districts.

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YDI assists youth practitioners, locally and nationally, to build their skills and knowledge in youth development. This work is interdisciplinary and addresses youth employment, education, after-school and non-school hour programs. YDI engages youth workers from these and other fields in sharing and developing their ideas. YDI conducts training, provides organizational support, facilitates networks of youth workers, and raises and distributes funds to support special programs. YDI has also worked with the City University of New York to create a college course that provides 12 college credits and a certificate for youth workers. YDI's publications on youth development are widely distributed among government, funders and others to support their work in youth. YDI receives support from a wide number of private funders including:

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V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse: **ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education**
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